

Pakistan Earthquake Relief Fund

Nora Wintour, PSI Equality and Rights officer, met with members of the PSI Pakistan affiliates coordinating committee in Lahore on 21 December to discuss proposals for providing relief and reconstruction assistance to the families of union members who have been affected by the earthquake. Nora handed over the first contribution from the PSI relief fund. The PSI affiliates expressed their strong commitment to assist the victims of the earthquake and their willingness to volunteer their time in the reconstruction effort. Nora also attended the annual meeting of the Pakistan WAPDA Central Labour Union to deliver a message of solidarity and support to the families of workers who had suffered in the earthquake, and to express support for the union's campaign to oppose further privatisation of the water and electricity company. <http://www.world-psi.org/earthquake>.

Pay Equity Now! on DVD

Pay Equity Now! looks at the experiences of women in the Philippines, Namibia and the United Kingdom. It explores some of the different strategies that trade unions can adopt to improve women's pay. This DVD forms part of the PSI Resource Package designed to help unions build strategies and campaigns to achieve pay equity. The DVD is in English, French and Spanish. If you would like a copy, please send your name and address to equality@world-psi.org.

The best thing since sliced bread

PSI American affiliate SEIU has been holding a contest since early December 2005 to find the best idea to improve the day-to-day lives of ordinary Americans. The response has been outstanding, with more than 22,000 ideas submitted, and the winning idea will win a \$100,000 prize. The seven finalists covered issues such as sustainable resources, minimum wage, health care and public education reform. Voting has now closed, and the grand prize winner will be announced along with the two runner ups at an awards ceremony in Washington on February 1st. See www.sinceslicedbread.com.

Workers strike for wages and pensions

Government workers in Chad have been involved in a general strike since the beginning of the year. They held a protest in the capital N'Djamena on 16 January. Their demands are the payment of at least four months in unpaid salaries, the payment of government pensions and a five percent raise promised by Chad's President Idriss Deby in 2004. Students also participated in the strike in support of their teachers, and retirees carried banners that read "Congratulations to the president and the prime minister - In 2005 not a single pension was paid". The strike has been widely observed in a country where the failure to pay government workers is common. A union official explained that Chad's problem is not a lack of funds but corruption and bad governance.

Pacific solidarity

A new programme developed by the New Zealand Public Services Association and PSI is offering practical support to trade unions in a number of Pacific nations. Fifteen New Zealand and Australian unions have joined up with existing and emerging unions in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Samoa, Cook Islands and the Solomon Islands, as well as providing support to the Tongan Interim PSA. PSI Sub-regional secretary for Oceania, Mike Ingpen (pictured), says Pacific unions need differing levels of support, depending on their stage of development. In addition to supporting the establishment of a union for public services workers in Tonga, the PSI is involved in two other projects working with the Samoa Public Service Association and the Cook Islands Workers' Association. The support has included collective bargaining and delegate training and has already seen membership of both unions increase.

Gender equality in Ukraine

On 1 January, a new law on equal rights of men and women came into effect in Ukraine. The public services trade unions had pressed for the adoption of this legislation for a long time. The law is aimed at gender equality in all spheres of life and it prohibits any discrimination on gender basis. But the new law still has flaws. "I don't really think that the situation will change radically," says Tamila Kazarina, President of the Health Care Workers Union, "As long as wages in health care, culture and education sectors, in which the majority of workers are women, are lower than in industry, the discrimination will remain." The new law has no real implementation mechanisms. The number of women in government remains low. Women make up 72% of state workers, but they occupy only 8% of the higher positions. But women make up 80% of highly-qualified unemployed. The law provides no sanctions in case of its violation, either. Nevertheless it does provide a first step to introducing changes to civil, labour and criminal codes to bring them in line with gender equality.

UK private finance initiative a costly disaster

The future of PFI health projects in the UK is in doubt, with the government imposing a review of the £1bn Royal London and St Bartholemew's hospitals scheme on the grounds of affordability (see <http://www.keepournhspublic.com/newsroundup> 27 Dec). Queen Elizabeth hospital in Woolwich, another flagship PFI hospital, is "technically bankrupt", largely due to the cost of its PFI repayments. The PFI deal adds £9m to yearly costs over an equivalent hospital built with public money (see <http://www.keepournhspublic.com/newsroundup.php> 16 Dec)

When users can't pay

The international **Association of Chartered Certified Accountants** has been investigating the affects of user fees in public services. Considering the effects on poverty in Africa, the Association found that fees for accessing basic healthcare services were introduced as part of the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s. The introduction of fees for visits to Kenyan outpatient health centres led to a 52 percent reduction in such visits. After fees were suspended, visits rose 41 percent. Similarly in Papua New Guinea, the introduction of user fees led to a 30 percent decline in outpatient visits. In villages in Gambia where insecticide was provided free of charge, bed net impregnation for malaria prevention was five times higher than in villages where charges were introduced. Thus hard experience has demonstrated that user fees, at least in health, are detrimental to the eradication of poverty and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Association's excellent Public Sector Bulletin is available here: <http://www.accaglobal.com/transparency/publicsector/overview/bulletin>.

Working with the staff of NGOs

Unions who cover public services often organise the staff who work for NGOs as well. (Just as union workers are often volunteers or members of NGOs). PSI wants to collect information from affiliates on

NGO coverage. Can your union help? In particular we want to find out:

1. If you organise NGO staff, would you organise in all NGOs or just in particular kinds of NGOs? If the latter, can you give us some detail, please
 2. What have been the most common issues/problems - for the NGO workers and for you as a union organising them?
 3. Does organising these workers call for a different approach from a public sector union? Can you give examples?
 4. If the NGO concerned provides some public services, does organising their staff create a conflict with your public sector members?
 5. Does organising such workers create problems between the union and the NGO movement?
- If you can help us with this enquiry, please contact Mike.Waghorne@world-psi.org.

Committee on workers' capital

The **Committee on Workers' Capital (CWC)** brings together representatives of the international labour movement to share information and develop strategies for joint action in the field of workers' capital, including such areas as pension trustee education, corporate and financial market governance, shareholder activism and economically targeted investment. It is a joint venture between the ICFTU, TUAC and the Global Union Federations. Participation in the CWC is open to representatives of the labour movement involved in worker capital issues. Currently there are four working groups centred on pension education, corporate governance and financial market representation, shareholder activism and economically targeted investment. For further information, see <https://www.workerscapital.org/>.

Globalisation does not reduce poverty

This is one of the conclusions to be drawn from the 4th edition of **Key Indicators of the Labour Market**, an ILO report published in December. ILO Director-General Juan Somavia, says that globalisation has so far not led to the creation of sufficient and sustainable decent work opportunities around the world. Indeed, currently, about half of the world's workers still do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US\$2 a day poverty line. In Sub-Saharan Africa the number of workers living on less than US\$1 per day increased by 28 million between 1994 and 2004. The study finds that for millions of workers, new jobs often provide barely enough income to lift them above the poverty line. In many developing economies the problem is mainly a lack of decent and productive work opportunities rather than outright unemployment. Women and men are working long and hard for very little because their only alternative is to have no income at all. See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/kilm/>

The Social Cost of China's Accession to the WTO

China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2001, after preparing and negotiating for membership for 15 years. The government believed that once China joined the WTO, foreign investment would flood into the country and China's economy would develop rapidly, creating job opportunities for many Chinese. They stopped attempts to modernize government administration, economic planning and management, and corporate management, focusing instead on attracting foreign investment. As a result, China's economy is heavily dependent on foreign trade, which now accounts for more than 70 percent of China's national income. Many enterprises have been forced to close down or be privatised. Even companies with good performance have cut their workforce in order to improve competitiveness. The number of unemployed and the poor in the cities has grown dramatically. Of the existing jobs, many are temporary positions and working conditions have worsened. For today's workers, the hours are long, the workload is heavy, and the wages are low. Workers in all industries in China work an average of 50 hours a week. As a result of government reforms, less than 15 percent of the workforce in China has a pension plan and medical insurance. About half the population in China does not go to the doctor when they are ill because they cannot afford to. From the China Labour Bulletin. See www.clb.org.hk.

Global Labour University course 2006

The Global Labour University is offering a one-year **Masters programme on Labour Politics and Globalisation** for trade unionists. It is a recognised degree awarded by the University of Kassel and the Berlin School of Economics. The Global Labour University brings together the worlds of trade unions and academic research, giving young people with some trade union experience a chance to pursue academic work. The Global Labour University is supported by the ILO, the Hans Boeckler Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities and its project partners offer a limited number of scholarships to applicants from developing and transition economies. Applications for the 2006/07 course should be made **before 1st March**. For more detailed information and an application form see www.global-labour-university.org.

Website updates

The **Resource Bank** page on the PSI website has undergone renovation. This is the page on which you can withdraw or deposit news on quality public services in unions around the world. In addition to the sections on participation, quality jobs, privatisation, strategies and financing services, there is now a new button called "Latest deposits" so that users can immediately see what's new in the bank. It is also now easier to make deposits to the bank by filling in a simple form. See www.world-psi.org/bank.

Interested in joining PSI?

PSI has created a new web page answering various questions about **PSI affiliation, goals, expenditure and fees**. If you are interested in knowing more about joining PSI, click here: <http://www.world-psi.org/joinPSI>. French and Spanish versions will be available soon. For further information you can also contact communications@world-psi.org.

Quote of the day

"Where once people chose to work in the public sector for the job security, pension, sense of vocation, and even for reasons of patriotic duty, today the biggest carrot to dangle, by far, is the influence on offer - the influence to change people's lives for the better." Leo Hickman in The Guardian, 17 January 2006 (see the article **Should you go public?** on www.world-psi.org)

New to the News?

If you do not wish to receive PSI World News by email again, please reply with the word **unsubscribe** in your message. You can also subscribe in French, Spanish, Japanese or Russian. Pass it on!
